Assessment and feedback for effective student learning

A guide for staff on implementing the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy

University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

The place of useful learning

The University of Strathclyde is committed to its mission as a place of 'useful learning'. A key part of this commitment is about developing students who have the knowledge and skills to make significant contributions to their communities after graduation as employees, employers and citizens.

To fully realise this commitment, it is essential that our approach to assessment and feedback effectively facilitates and supports students' learning and development. Recent publications on assessment in higher education suggest a 'transformation' is required to ensure that assessment and feedback practices enable students to develop the aptitudes and capacities needed to be lifelong learners in the 21st century.

A new Assessment and Feedback Policy, approved by Senate in 2014, is underpinned by 4 new principles of assessment and feedback. Together, these principles reflect the aim that our assessment and feedback practices promote effective student learning, as well as ensuring our practices in this area are fair, transparent, and continuously reviewed.

This document is designed to support staff in implementing the new policy in all stages of the assessment and feedback process. The document is structured to provide guidance (colour coded according to the relevant principle) at each stage of the assessment and feedback process, from the class design/redesign stage through to the end of module/programme review.

A similar document has been produced for students, outlining what students should expect from the university in relation to assessment and feedback, and the areas for which they are responsible.

The 4 Principles of Assessment and Feedback

The 4 principles are:

Principle 1:
Assessment and Feedback Practices Promote Effective Student Learning

Principle 2:
Assessment and Feedback Practices are Appropriate, Fair, and Transparent

Principle 3:
Assessment and Feedback Practices are Clearly Communicated to Students and Staff

Principle 4:
Assessment and Feedback Practices are Continuously Reviewed

To support staff in adhering to the principles of assessment and feedback, each stage of the process has been outlined in terms of the staff responsibilities.

Class/Programme design or redesign

- Explore the range of assessment methods available, including non-weighted/weighted assessment, continuous and/or exam components

- Choose the most appropriate assessment method based on:
- facilitating students' attainment of the specified knowledge, understanding, and transferable skills
- fostering student engagement
- assessing the class/programme's intended learning outcomes
- consideration of student and staff workloads

- Be aware of other assessment and feedback activities students are involved in within the subject

- Decide the feedback method, including the timing, format, and feedforward opportunities to other assessments

- Consider how to actively involve students in the process

- Ensure that the proposed feedback strategy helps students understand the extent to which they have fulfilled the assessment criteria, and supports future development of students' work

- Write clear assessment criteria that will allow grading and feedback to be based on students' attainments against the criteria and agreed standards

- Consider how inclusive the proposed assessment and feedback method is, and if necessary, make changes so that practices are fair, inclusive and accessible to all students

- To obtain an overview of the range of assessment and feedback activities that the cohort of students are engaged in within your discipline, check with colleagues who are also involved in assessing the same cohort of students to avoid, where possible, the bunching of assessments

- Consider how students will be made aware at the beginning of a class of (e.g. Myplace, handbook, slides):
  – the purpose, weighting, and timing of assessment,
  – the importance of academic honesty in assessment,
  – the nature and timing of feedback

- Decide on the process for marking, moderation, and feedback and circulate this to all markers

- Put in place a strategy for the review of the assessment and feedback activities that ensures that the practices continue to be fit for purpose

At the start of the class

- Remain informed of any updates from the Disability Service regarding reasonable adjustments to students' assessment and/or feedback to ensure accessibility for all students

- Communicate to students the intended learning outcomes of the class and how the assessment and feedback practices align with these learning outcomes

- Encourage students to be active in the assessment and feedback process

- Emphasise to students the importance of academic honesty

- Inform students of the purpose, weighting, and timing of the assessment(s)

- Give students information on the nature and timing of feedback

- Ensure there are opportunities for students to discuss and clarify the assessment, as appropriate

- Explain the processes for marking and moderation

- Inform students of any penalties for failing to submit an assessment on time

- Explain to students that all assessment and feedback activities, and the outcomes of assessment, are continuously reviewed, and that their views are taken into account

Pre-assessment

- Year co-ordinators and/or Directors of Teaching/Course Leaders should check the provisional examination timetable on its release by Student Business for the dates of exams for a given cohort within the discipline so that changes to the provisional exam timetable can be requested in the event of exam bunching

- Make sure the necessary arrangements are in place for students registered with the Disability Service and who have recommended adjustments to their assessments and/or feedback

- Inform students and staff (including markers) of the criteria and standards used to assess and provide feedback

- Give students and staff the opportunity to engage in a dialogue around assessment, e.g. to clarify any assessment criteria or feedback

Marking and feedback

Make sure feedback:

- Is useful, constructive and supportive

- Helps students understand the extent to which they have fulfilled the assessment criteria, and tells students how to improve their work

- Is given in a format that is fair, inclusive and accessible to all students, checking that any required reasonable adjustments are taken into account

- Feedback, and the grading of students' work, is consistent and based solely on students' attainment against the assessment criteria and standards

Also, make sure that:

- The marking is carried out in line with rigorous academic standards and is based on clearly defined assessment criteria

- Where possible, marking is conducted blind/anonymously (i.e. the student's identity is not known)

- All markers are aware of the criteria and standards used to assess and provide feedback on students' work and that these are used when marking

Post-marking

- Ensure the moderation process, as explained to students and staff, is appropriate and fair

- Return marks and/or feedback to students by the time stated at the start of the class. If this is not possible, communicate any delay to the students with an updated feedback date

- Offer students the opportunity to clarify any feedback

- Gain an overview of how the class as a whole performed in the assessment, so that this information can be used to shape future teaching and assessment and feedback planning

Review

- Consider the extent to which the assessment and feedback practices promoted effective student learning of the intended learning outcomes in the module and/or programme

- Consider the extent to which students were actively engaged in the assessment task, and in giving or seeking feedback

- At programme level, review the assessment and feedback activities to confirm that a range of assessment methods are used and that these are designed to support students' attainment of knowledge, understanding, and transferable skills

- Check that the assessment and feedback practices are fair, inclusive and accessible to all students

- Obtain quantitative data on students' performance in assessment(s), and use this information to inform teaching and review of the assessment for subsequent deliveries

- Enable the students to contribute to the review process by including questions on the assessment(s) and feedback in any module evaluation questionnaires

- Continuously review all assessment and feedback activities, and the outcomes of assessment, for example, during the class review and external examining processes

Further Reading

AbuSeileek, A F, (2013) Using track changes and word processor to provide corrective feedback to learners in writing. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 29 (4), 319–333.

Boud, D., & Associates. (2010). Assessment 2010: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Boud, D, & Falchikov, N (2007) Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education - Learning for the longer term. 1st ed. Oxon: Routledge. Available at: http://lib.myilibrary.com/Open.aspx?id=73882&src=0

Boud, D, & Molloy, E (2013) Feedback in Higher and Professional Education. Understanding it and doing it well. Oxon: Routledge. Available at https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9780203074336.

Higher Education Academy. (2012). A Marked Improvement. Transforming assessment in higher education. York:

The Higher Education Academy. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf

Jonsson, A, & Gunilla, S, (2007) The use of scoring rubrics: Reliability, validity and educational consequences. Educational Research Review, 2 (2), 130 -144.

Merry, S, Price, M, Carless, D, & Taras, M, (2013) Reconceptualising Feedback in Higher Education. 1st ed. Oxon: Routledge. Available from: https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9780203522813

Nicol , D, (2010) From monologue to dialogue: improving written feedback processes in mass higher education. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35 (5), 501-517.

Nicol , D, Thomson, A, & Breslin, C, (2014) Rethinking feedback practices in higher education: a peer review perspective. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 39 (1), 102-122.

Panadero, E, & Jonsson, A, (2013) The use of scoring rubrics for formative assessment purposes revisited: A review. Educational Research Review, 9, 129-144.

Online Resources

JISC Assessment and Feedback Programme,
www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/
assessmentandfeedback.aspx [accessed 21 August 2014]

Higher Education Academy
www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/
assessment-and-feedback

**University of Strathclyde, Re-engineering Assessment
Practices in Higher Education,**
www.reap.ac.uk/ [accessed 21 August 2014]

Relevant university resources

University of Strathclyde, Assessment and Feedback Policy
www.strath.ac.uk/staff/policies/academic

University of Strathclyde, Learning and Teaching
www.strath.ac.uk/learnteach/informationforstaff/

University of Strathclyde, Disability Service
www.strath.ac.uk/disabilityservice

University of Strathclyde, Maths Skills
www.strath.ac.uk/mathsskills

University of Strathclyde, Student Support Services
www.strath.ac.uk/studying/prospective/support

University of Strathclyde, Study Skills
www.strath.ac.uk/studyskills